

Early detection key to combating breast cancer

By Marla Bernard
48th Medical Operations Squadron

The most common cancer in women is breast cancer. Over 145,000 cases of breast cancer are found in the U.S. each year and 45,000 women die of this disease each year. It is the second most common cause of cancer death in women.

At least one out of every 10 women get breast cancer during their lifetime. Although factors such as a family history of breast cancer increases a woman's chance of getting this form of cancer, every woman is at risk. In fact, 75 percent of breast cancers occur in women with no risk factors at all.

The key to combating breast cancer is finding it early when it is still small. There are several screening methods that are used to detect breast cancer at an early stage. One of these is the breast self examination. This is a quick physical and visual exam that women can perform themselves. Doctors recommend that women over the age of 20 do a BSE every month, one week after the start of menstruation. Classes on how to do breast self exam are available to the RAF Lakenheath, RAF Feltwell and RAF Mildenhall communities by calling the Lakenheath Hospital at Ext. 6396.

The clinical breast exam is another method of breast cancer early detection. This is a physical exam of your breasts, similar to the self breast exam, that is performed by your health care provider. It is recommended that women between the ages of 20 and 40 have one of these every three years and women over the age of 40 should have one every year.

Mammography is the third method of screening for breast cancer. Mammography is a special x-ray of the breast that can often find a lump before it can be felt. Over 40 percent of cancers are found by mammography alone. When breast cancers are found at an early stage by mammography, earlier treatment is possible which can many times lead to a cure.

Unfortunately, mammography cannot find every breast cancer early. Some women, particularly under age 35, have radiographically dense breasts. This means that the breast tissue is of a

type that can prevent cancers from being seen. About 10 percent of breast cancers can be felt but cannot be seen by mammography. Because of this, a woman needs to have both mammography and regular physical examinations. Mammography cannot replace monthly breast self exam and the annual physical exam by your health care provider. Although it is rare, breast cancer can occur in men. Therefore, any man who finds a lump in his breast should have it checked by his doctor.

Mammography uses a very low dose of radiation and is quite safe. Experts calculate the risk of getting breast cancer from the mammography radiation is one in a million. (This is the same risk as dying from a single chest x-ray or from drinking thirty cans of diet soda.) Breast tissue in younger women is more sensitive to radiation, and is also radiographically dense, so mammography is avoided in women under age 35 except in special cases. After age 35, however, the benefits of screening with mammography far exceed the very small risk from radiation exposure.

The recommended screening guidelines for breast cancer in women without any known problems include:

- ☐ Monthly self breast exam beginning at age 20.
 - ☐ Breast exams by a health care provider every three years between the ages of 20 and 40 and every year after 40.
 - ☐ Baseline mammogram by the age of 40 (i.e. between age 35 and 40)
 - ☐ Screening mammogram every 1 to 2 years from age 40 to 49 and every year after age 50. Some organizations, including the American Cancer Society and the American College of Radiology, recommend a screening mammogram every year after age 40.
- For women with a strong family history** (3 or more relatives with breast cancer, or anyone whose mother or sister had breast cancer before age 40):
- ☐ Breast exams every year by a health care provider beginning at the age of 25.
 - ☐ For women who have a sister or mother who had breast cancer before menopause, annual screening mammography should begin at an age 5 years younger than the age of her sister or mother at time of diagnosis, or age 35, whichever is earlier.

Activities set for National Disabilities Awareness Month

By Capt. Ann Musto
48th Medical Operations Squadron

National Disabilities Awareness Month is a special emphasis program. It falls under the category of similar programs such as National Black Heritage Month, Hispanic Heritage Month and Women's History Month. The purpose of National Disabilities Awareness Month is to recognize our disabled population and their valuable contributions to society.

The term "disabled" does not apply only to the physically disabled person. It also includes the emotional and learning disabled population. With this in mind, the population can include the military spouse, child and active duty member.

Three legal documents that guide us in promoting and protecting the rights of these individuals are the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Public Law

94-142), and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

The Rehabilitation Act, Section 503, is specific to federal contractors and is utilized by the Equal Employment Opportunities office at RAF Mildenhall.

Public Law 94-142 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 ensure that all children, despite any disabilities, have available to them "a free and appropriate public education." Many programs are available to our children through the Air Force Services for Exceptional Children program.

The Americans with Disabilities Act is divided into five titles and promotes making "American society more accessible to people with disabilities." This act primarily affects businesses and accommodations for disabled employees.

The focus of this year's observance is to increase public awareness and sensitivity in regard to our military and civilian disabled population.

Community functions this month include:

☐ RAF Lakenheath and RAF Mildenhall library displays featuring books written by and about people with disabilities.

☐ RAF Lakenheath AYA presentation at 3:30 p.m. Oct. 10. Teachers and students from RAF Lakenheath Elementary School will address educational and sensitivity issues in regard to interacting with our disabled population. Target audience is parents and the after-school students.

☐ Liberty Intermediate Unit community displays featuring student interpretations of "What it means to be disabled" through the use of written and drawn mediums.

☐ Listings of videos with a brief description of contents regarding physical, emotional and learning disabilities, posted at Electric Avenue and the shoppette.

☐ A luncheon from 11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m. Oct. 15 in the officers' club ballroom. Guest speakers are Karen Smith and Capt. Mark Martello, family advocacy. Make reservations by Oct. 3 by calling Ext. 5921.